

BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Guardiola-Rivera, Oscar (2017) Fanon and the intelligent machine; concerning violence, Part 2. Reflections from a conversation with Gayatri Spivak. *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 39 (2), pp. 177-194. ISSN 1522-5351.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/17966/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively

**Fanon and the Intelligent Machine; Concerning Violence, Part 2:
Reflections From a Conversation With Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak**

Oscar Guardiola-Rivera

Scenes from the Imperialistic Self-Defense: Healing Image or the Law of Laws

“Let me say from the outset that it would be a mistake to make Fanon into a clay model for revolution,” Gayatri Spivak tells me. I’ve asked her about Göran Olson’s celebrated 2014 documentary, Concerning Violence: Nine Scenes from the Anti-Imperialistic Self-Defense, which she appears in, reading a preface at the start of the film.¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a Founding Member of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University and widely acknowledged as one of the most important thinkers and literary critics of our time. In 2012 she received the Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy, considered by some an equivalent to the Nobel Prize in the areas not recognized by the latter. To many of us she is a teacher, a friend, and the author of an influential body of work that includes A Critique of Postcolonial Reason and more recently a translation of Aimé Césaire’s play A Season in the Congo.² Her participation in Olson’s documentary revealed a new facet in Spivak’s work and career: not just a film critic, but as I would like to present her in this piece (after Fanon, the protagonist of the film) a photo-electric analyst of the time dimension, the law of laws according to Jean Epstein.³

She engages Olson’s film in signature critical mode. As a counterpoint to the documentary, her preface-appearance avoids the often-repeated story of Fanon as a

champion of counter-violence. "Instead," she says, "one must understand that in the initial chapters of The Wretched of the Earth, which a lot of people read as an apology of violence, Fanon is actually claiming complicity with what was surrounding him. That is, the violence of colonization." "I will be as violent as they are, when they hold my life as worth less than theirs," says Frantz Fanon, the healer.

What does it mean to be a healer? I wonder. As someone born in the Americas, from Caribbean and indigenous as well as European heritage, let me answer with an Amerindian emphasis: to be a healer is to be a shaman. The shaman develops an image-based or speech-based technology that allows crowds and individuals to notice their awkwardness and what they endeavor to conceal in everyday life, for instance with the help of hallucinogenic drugs or chanting and the ritual eating of each others' words. But in these exceptional situation ghosts speak as well in a voice that the living, in all sincerity, "do not and cannot recognize".⁴ In this respect at least, the shaman performs a healing function. This performance function, the revelation of a looming stranger self that may be threatening and monstrous yet diminished or appeased through its exteriorization in speech or image, of a failure in the recognition of an alien perspective that must be heard and made interior from the outside, is something that the shaman has in common with the cinematographer and the psychiatrist or psychoanalyst. Hence my reference to what Jean Epstein called photo-electric psychoanalysis and to Fanon and Spivak (the playwright and the translator of playwrights as well as documentary films about a playwright who was also a psychoanalyst) as both healer and image.

Politically speaking this is to say, first, that I accept as a central question that of what is it that haunts every revolutionary or decolonization movement: "whether the successors will remain stuck within the trajectory of domination and submission previously occupied by the colonizers or whether they will succeed in shifting from the

paradigm of domination to that of liberation.”⁵ This question pertains to the time dimension and variation of the anticipation and expectation of liberation, which is concealed in everyday life even under revolutionary conditions. Second, it is because (not in spite) of this emphasis on inconstancy and the time dimension, the images and voices we hear uttering the contradictions of our universal ideals and given institutions from the outside but fail to recognize, and instead tend to externalize as evil thereby foreclosing their and our future, that I must come clean on the issue of shifting from domination to liberation: I do not believe that it’s a culturally specific issue. To be the subject of a life that the subject wants to continue to live (conatus, the making of an open future rather than an elementary continuity) just means to arrange and rearrange relations that include humans and nonhumans in ever more radically open and just ways, not necessarily in opposition and not ever holding one end as less worthy.

If this is the case, then space-time relations (especially time) play the most important part and yet, in itself, this location or relation is nothing like a substance (no precise location can be established without certain probability, which means that reality can never be a certainty) and more like the confluence of several perspectives and it also amount to an effect of perspective: the imaginary becoming real, also crucial to the question of justice as not only inter-personal but also inter-temporal, or justice as an option. It is also the singular way in which the cinematograph, leaping from the subjective to the objective and vice versa, the “thinking machine” as Epstein called it, suggests a worldview that is also singular. In their very singularity, the voices that utter contradiction in the worldview suggested by the cinematograph demonstrate that the contradiction manifested in exclusions and voiced by the excluded themselves is precisely “what allows universality to be ‘verified’ as such” because it prevents it from compromising on its principle and being reduced or devolving into a mere situation of

force or domination.⁶ Put otherwise, rather than having to do with identity difference or cultural specificity, these voices are twice inscribed in the universal, both indicative of a defective or failed relation and a figure of the universal, suggestive of a worldview or a mode of location in space-time, especially the future as it opens up the interrupted past.

This is ontology, a consideration of time variation as a condition or parameter of fullness and self-determination that is our task as philosophers and legal theorists to elucidate. It is not to be confused with essences or necessity, as in the talk of essential attributes or the autochthony of a given subjectivity (what Spivak calls the “transparent I,” neither “European” nor “Third World”) and less so with the pathologies—which on the whole refer to a condition of lack—that affect peoples and individuals as the latter struggle to specify ontological parameters in theory and practice (at the rhetorical, meta-psychological, or sociogenic level, as well as the level of our particular outlook). The strength (impetus) of the kind of postcolonial and decolonial theory that Spivak is well known for, together with Homi Bhabha or Walter D. Mignolo, comes from the fact that it has done a lot to criticize theories that illicitly smuggle particular outlooks and historical contingencies into social, legal, and other meta-psychological theories, foreclose the parameters of subjectivity by reducing them to given subjectivities, or simply engage in historical revisionism. For that we remain sympathetic and grateful. However, post- and decolonial theory has often confused this impetus and the conatus whose conditions we must elucidate at the ontological level. The unfortunate result has been to take the Third World peoples as models of authenticity, as cultural others that went from becoming “our victims to being our redeemers” even as their situation (essence?) continues to be determined in quasi-essentialist terms as one of lack.⁷

That is why it is so important to acknowledge Spivak when she says that it would be a mistake to make Fanon into a clay model for revolution. I interpret this statement

as profoundly self-critical move. Also a move that brings Fanon closer to the project of anthropology at the cusp of its reinvention: “the passage from an image of the other defined by a state of lack or need, by a negative distance in relation to the Self, to an alterity endowed with endo-consistency, autonomy or independence in relation to the image of ourselves.”⁸ It entails a form of universalization, establishing an exchange of images between Self and Other.

Crucially, this form of universalization avoids the synecdoche of the universal insofar as in the exchange of images between Self and Other there is no substitution of the part for the whole. No Self in this relation becomes the representative of the whole, or the human as such. And no other becomes the representative of some essential lack. Rather, in order to bring Self and other together as a whole, first it is necessary to see them as multiple components of a single failed relation or a failure in recognition to use the language closer to Fanon. A failed relation inscribed within the very being of the term deemed as Other (Fanon’s *damnés*), which at the same time can stand as a figure of the anticipated universal, a more integral humanity.

As observed before in the kind of Hegelian language that Fanon inherited and subverted, one of the terms in the relation becomes twice a component of the universal: first, as the part that is discounted from the set of humanity once Whiteness is identified by the colonizer with the Universal to which he claims exclusive access under such names as “civilization”, “the civilized world”, or “Western civilization”. This failure of recognition becomes an absolute partition of the human insofar as the names “color”, “black” and “blackness” are uttered as a damnation and allowed to stand solely for the absolute negation of a common humanity. This entails the foreclosure of any anticipated future, for blacks as well as whites, which returns presently in the image of collective fantasies of animality and animal-like sexuality or machinery without intelligence. For

instance, as in the fantasy of the rapist colored male without interiority mobilized by Donald Trump during the 2016 campaign in relation to Mexicans and Latinos (the fastest-growing demographic in the United States, set to overturn the majority status and privileges associated with whiteness by 2040) modeled in older fantasies about the hyper-sexuality of African male slaves as well as indigenous women.

This juxtaposition between the subservient position of indigenous women (subjection) and the fallen position into which blacks and colored peoples are precipitated (*expositio*, abjection) comes the closest to Spivak's use of the term "subaltern". It pertains to the second role of the negated term of the relation in staging the universal: as negated subject (or subject/object) which turns every encounter into a failed relation and thus into a non-relation that takes place or is staged in each exchange of words and gazes between subjects in the colonial context until the present, for in this scenario there is no "post-colony" in the conditions of the modern, colonial, capitalist world of nation-states. There is only the manifestation of an impossibility (i. e. the contradiction affecting the very name or expression of the Universal as "Man" and "Citizen" since behind them always lurks the spectral figuration of the inner foreigner, the internal enemy or the stranger as well as such notions as purity, autochtony and mixture) or an impotence out of which (because hell, the zone of non-being is and feels intolerable) transformation emerges.

Such transformation would consist of the construction, by way of the image of the other, of another image of the object and of thought, of economy, of culture, sociality, law, and politics. In terms of the transformation of the mode of production it entails to carry out and persist in what Paget Henry among others calls the "vertical revolution" (self-transcendence and erotic transformation) precisely as we strive to answer the question of how does the economy work for the flourishing of everyone

(horizontal revolution). In terms of the transcendence of the human it entails avoiding the easy conflation between “Man” and European man, subject to the impact and acceleration of full automation and financialization, to recognize that we have never been purely human and thus that to let go of or liberate nature is part of a praxis of the human. In terms of the geographies of reason, it means to understand that so-called western and non-western philosophical traditions can never be found in a pure state since they have emerged out of one another from the very outset. Thus, it is a delusion (part of the hallucinatory return of the foreclosed past and the future) to think that you can or should first think Western philosophy purely through its own sources and only then situate it in relation to a thought from the Global South. And in terms of transforming our mode of prediction, it could also be called a science of continuous variations that reintroduces the openness of the anticipated future into the past and the present, as opposed to a science of the reproduction of scarcity that forecloses the past and the future, offering us only a congealed form of the “extreme” present: the other? they’re just like us, genetic maximizers and possessive individualists.⁹

The former is the shift undertaken by both anthropology and philosophy as practiced by the Caribbean Philosophical Association, which I adhere to. Call it “permanent decolonization,” for short. It is a move that makes Fanon more relevant today.

Let me illustrate this by means of a provocation: the black man (also the Amerindian, the Asian, and so on) has no ontology. If Slavoj Žižek were to say this he would be immediately criticized as racist, especially by some of his so-called leftist friends. But he didn’t say this, at least he hasn’t yet. Fanon did.¹¹ And what Fanon meant was that colonial society makes subjectivity and consciousness impossible for the colonized, so there can be no such thing as a black man insofar as being black means

you're not human. "White" stands in this case as the genus-species as well as the species-species of black, substituting itself for the human once humanity has done the same in relation to nature (which is why without species-centrism there's no ethno-centrism). This also means that the black man has no experience of himself as having ontology, because he is not an authority for himself.

In Latin America this is the default position of right-wing pundits and politicians: unable to experience themselves as an authority for themselves, their politics are often reduced to a desire to have the privileges of the master/father for themselves. Their fantasy, as Fanon memorably put it, is to fuck the master's wife.

Fanon the healer was a psychiatrist, a social theorist, and a revolutionary. He saw the problem of whether successive generations of revolutionary and decolonization movements remain stuck within the trajectory of domination and submission previously occupied by the colonizers or shift toward liberation, as an instance of the dual aspect of the Oedipus complex: to desire what the father has or try an alternative and more just path. More accurately, he wondered what happened when the Oedipus complex failed to develop. His answer was: Narcissus happens. The narcissist seeks a deluding self-image in the eyes of others and is thus seduced by the deception,¹² leading to "narcissistic rage" manifested as a hatred of limitations in one's desire to live without limitations. In the Americas, the latter affects not only the populist and neo-fascist right but also the disenchanted left.

The enraged narcissist desires to be special without limitation, which amounts to being the most exceptional; in a word, godlike, or better, a god. The fact that characters like this enter the political arena seated on the high horse of religious moralism is therefore not surprising. One Latin American example is former Colombian president Álvaro Uribe Vélez; the example will prove more relevant if it is true, as Linda Martín-

Alcoff has suggested, that America's Donald Trump must be seen as an Uribe-like figure.¹³ In relation to such characters and the phenomena associated with their rise in recent times, we need to develop a totally different theory of the state as well as an alternative legal science that owes more to the insights of anthropology, institutional psychiatry, and dramaturgy—and Anti-Narcissus theory. We cannot develop such an approach here, but at least we can ask: what if we were to apply this Fanonian provocation to today's America, to Europe, and to the Middle East?

The Healer

I ask Spivak about her views on Fanon, in particular, and of decolonization in general. “[Fanon] reflects philosophically on his complicity as ‘a gentleman’ of the French empire,” she replies, before engaging in a concise and masterful reading of Fanon's most controversial work: “The middle chapter has more to do, along the lines of [W.E.B] Du Bois, whose work I've also engaged, with how not to construct him as just a black man and a problem. By the end of the book, Fanon is reading Hegel. As I said, he was not incapable of understanding philosophy. He's an intellectual who deliberately reads the Phenomenology [of Spirit] as a historical narrative, consciously disobeying Hegel's simple enough injunction that if you read it that way you would stall the philosophical project of phenomenology. He doesn't care. This is extremely important, and here I want him to mark an affinity with him. This entire idea, of the sort of ‘intended mistake’ Fanon engages in by literalizing philosophy, has been my formula for the reading of Kant, Hegel, and other Western philosophers. Fanon decides to read Hegel in just such a way, placing himself in the position of the Hegelian subject. This is not finger-pointing. Rather, he's doing what I would call ‘affirmative sabotage’. Recognizing that what he is

doing is (affirmatively) sabotaging Hegel, by occupying the place of the normative subject, results in a very different Fanon.”

Spivak credits her friend, the novelist Assia Djébar, for much of her renewed perspective on Fanon and decolonization. Assia Djébar is the pen name of Algerian author, translator, and filmmaker Fatima Zohra-Imalayen. From Les enfants du nouveau monde (1962) (Children of the New World), through L'Amour, la fantasia (1985) (published in English as Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade), to Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement (1980) (published in English as Women of Algiers in Their Apartment) and Nulle part dans la maison du mon père (2008), Djébar reflected on her ambivalence about language and writing in French—having been denied entry into written Arabic in her time and place, as reflected in Nulle part dans la maison de mon père, which is dedicated to Spivak—as well as identifying herself as a Western-educated scholar, being at the same time an Algerian and a feminist Muslim intellectual and a spokesperson for North African women, for women in general, and for oppressed men and women. Her intellectual and political stance is well known: it is fiercely critical of male-dominated society and radically anti-colonial. Djébar was elected to the Académie Française in June 2006, the first writer from the Maghreb to become a member of the metropolitan learned society. By then she had won the coveted Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1996, the Yourcenar Prize in 1997, and the 2000 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. She was frequently named as a contender for the Nobel Prize on the strength of her entire body of work before her death in February this year.

“Assia called me her twin sister,” Spivak recalls. “I did not ask for it. It is an honor which I have the responsibility to live up to.” Djébar’s own reading of Fanon may be an instance of what Spivak calls “affirmative sabotage.” Throughout her literary and filmic work, she twists and turns Fanon’s central image of the unveiling of Algeria. In his A

Dying Colonialism, Fanon outlined the resistance by the men and women of the country to a colonial project aimed at defeating the Algerian nation by unveiling its women.¹⁴ The motif proved influential, appearing also in the contribution made by Iranian thinker Ali Shariati, himself a translator of Fanon, to the debates concerning Western monoculturalism in the context of the Iranian Revolution. Fanon had depicted Algeria as a veiled woman threatened with her unveiling—a metaphor for rape, as Rita Faulkner has observed. Thus, for Fanon the unveiling of Algeria is a sign, a key to unlock the psychological effects violence had on colonized North-Africans. But it is also a sign of hope. The new power that Algerian women found through their participation in the Algerian struggle for liberation can also be seen as a cypher of a future in which the persistence of women's equality would herald the historical realization of a modern, socialist, and revolutionary Algeria.

“My dear friend Djébar wrote in Tunis for the Moujahid and worked with Fanon, so she knew him very well,” says Spivak. Eleven years Fanon's junior, Djébar was twenty-three in 1959 when Fanon wrote A Dying Colonialism. It is likely that she influenced him while they worked together (she as journalist, he as writer and editor) for the revolutionary newspaper El-Moujahid. No doubt she was as familiar with Fanon's ideas as with the fact that he was drawing upon a connection between land, the nation, and women's bodies that can be said to be as old as literature and philosophy themselves, found in both the Biblical Book of Genesis and in verse 223 of the Second Sura of the Quran, as well as in traditional Western as well as modern Arabic literature.

In that tradition, Algeria was represented as a woman who stubbornly refused the “emancipatory seed” of French Western enlightenment as modernization; who resisted colonialism and globalization, but also as a body to be possessed; so that possessing, conquering, penetrating a North-African woman, in this scheme, is a step

toward conquering North Africa. The same can be said about America, the Amerindian continent thus named by Europeans following the Renaissance Latin tradition before that name was Anglicized and confused solely with its English-speaking part. In the original iconography, cartography, and literature of the Americas, from the fifteen century onward, the continent was often represented as an Amazon, a warrior, and a she-cannibal, while at the same time as an object of sexual desire. That representation is very much at stake in the kind of expressive violence taking place nowadays on the Mexican-American border, in Central America, and in Colombia, which another friend of Gayatri Spivak, the literary critic Jean Franco, dealt with in her book, Cruel Modernity.¹⁵ Such violence—feminicidio, or feminicide—focuses specifically, as Fanon put it, on the nameless, faceless women whose bodies become the very site of the various wars affecting the continent (insurgency, counter-insurgency, drugs) and whose existence is reduced to zero.

“It is through Assia Djébar that I get a sense of Fanon as a healer,” says Spivak. “The point that Fanon makes, which nobody bothers to read carefully, is that when you weigh lives so that one Israeli life, for instance, becomes equal to a hundred and fifty Palestinian lives, then violence emerges as the response.”

What is at stake here is not just Africa or the Americas, Israel or Palestine, and neither the colonial past nor a remnant of it in the post-colonial present. What is at stake, as Spivak explains invoking Fanon and Djébar, is the colonial fantasy. It persists—as Winifred Woodhull puts it, concurring with Spivak and Djébar’s analysis—“whether the imagined contact between races or peoples involves a perilous siege or easy pleasure.”¹⁶

And persist it does. Consider October 6, 2015. During the Conservative Conference in Manchester, then UK Home Secretary and now Prime Minister of Britain

Theresa May informed her audience that “when immigration is too high, when the pace of change is too fast, it’s impossible to build a cohesive society,”¹⁷ a comment that Prime Minister David Cameron subsequently signaled his agreement with. In his own speech delivered the following day, Cameron condemned racial discrimination in the name of a commendable, British, multi-cultural society.¹⁸ One day, imagined contact between peoples is deemed perilous. Next day, as easy pleasure. The bodies and souls of feminized others, once the site of colonial warfare, have now become “hearts and minds” to be weighed and won over, conquered, penetrated, in the war against terror, in order to ensure security and compromise between classes in the post-colonial twenty-first century.

Djebar takes stock of this fact in her writings, and of the place occupied by women in our supposedly decolonized societies more than twenty years after her collaboration with Fanon. Spivak invokes her to highlight the limits of women’s place and role today vis-à-vis the (Hegelian) historical, phenomenological, and speculative narrative undertaken by Fanon.

If Spivak views Fanon’s reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology as an “intended mistake” and as “an affirmative sabotage,” she also observes, again, that “we must not make Fanon into some clay figure,” or a model for all revolutions past and still to come. Instead, “we must take Fanon forward.” In other words, read him and formulate newer conjunctures.

Through Djebar, Spivak takes Fanon forward, affirmatively. If, as Lewis R. Gordon recognizes, “although he acknowledges the psychoanalytical contributions of Anna Freud, [for Fanon] the existential philosophical domains appear squarely in the hands of men,” through Djebar, Gayatri Spivak turns Fanon’s failure to articulate his indebtedness to Beauvoir and other women on its head.¹⁹ For in Djebar’s writing the

image of “unveiling Algeria” is uncoupled from its patriarchal origins in religious and secular literature, thereby turning Fanon’s limitation into an affirmation as well as a celebration of the richness of the women’s oral, critical, and enacting tradition, as presented, for instance, in her Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement (1980), which cuts across boundaries of tradition and modernity.²⁰ I believe it was the influence and criticism of women like Djébar that made Fanon into a healer, a trans-gender witch, and a shaman rather than a witch-hunter, allowing us to read him as such. I suspect Spivak would agree.

Concerning Violence

“It is through her [Djébar] that I get a sense of Fanon as a healer,” Spivak repeats.

“Again, the point that Fanon makes, which nobody bothers to consider carefully, is that it’s no use accusing anybody of violence when there is this kind of weighing of human life.” “Not even accusing the perpetrator of such violence and weighing?” I ask. “Yes, of course,” says Spivak, “but Fanon is not talking about the colonizer. He is talking about the colonized. He is saying that from the perspective of the one whose life has been so [weighed and] devalued, this is how violence comes.”

Thus understood, there is nothing relativistic in Fanon’s perspectivism. Rather, what follows is a questioning of the grounds for judgment, the weighing judgment of the former colonizer. Also a questioning of his assumed discursive mastery over the normative domain, that of law and order, which threatens to absorb the ethical entirely. Such a conflation of domains in the name of law’s autonomy—this is what Western jurists and politicians, as well as their imitators elsewhere, claim when they speak of “the rule of law”—is the mark of our rights-based, so-called post-colonial, post-class,

and post-racial societies. It leaves no room for proper distinctions between justice and what a certain society considers as just at some point in time. This, by the way, is not only the best description of today's historicist relativism but also the best prescription for totalitarianism and decisionism.²¹

"Fanon is saying that the violence which comes in response to the judgment of one [way of] life, that of the colonized, as weighing less than another, the colonizer's, is not to be judged on the same grounds," Spivak says. "He does not say one must condone violence. What he is really saying is that one must know there is no absolutist standard unless one has been even to [in trying to] bring about a situation where human lives are equal."

I ask Spivak whether this might be the reason why Fanon is making a comeback. He is being re-read nowadays against a situation dominated by an abstract normative injunction on violence that leaves no room for proper ethical distinctions. Or as Hegel and The Cure would put it, a night of the world in which all cats are gray. "Every single violence is supposed to be outlawed," I observe, "but specifically revolutionary violence. . . ." "In an absolutist way," Spivak adds, completing my sentence. "So we do not know anymore what is revolutionary violence. To an extent, the funniest thing is that the act of revolution is not by necessity a violent act. That is, if one is being close to Marx, and that is where I am; or to Luxembour, who was a fine reader of Marx and did things accordingly, and I am a Rosa Luxembour-style social democrat; or to Gramsci, and I am also close to Gramsci as a reader of Marx and a practitioner of subalternity. These are my models, although it is not up to me to stereotype myself in that way; others will see. In any case, in accordance with these exemplars—and this is also how it seems to me—the idea is not to see revolution as necessarily a site of violence except reactive violence.

And how to understand the nucleus of it: that is a much more complicated agenda, and I do not think we can apply Fanonian discourse to it," she explains.

"I have a feeling that if Fanon is going to be useful for us we have to see this, first," Spivak points out. "Second, we must not make him into some sort of clay figure. After all, this was a young man who died at thirty-six. So, all the time for developing politically still lay ahead of him. One has this unfortunate feeling also with Gramsci. On the other hand, [W. E. B] Du Bois died at ninety-five. One can see in this contrast that figures who are political evolve in time. This is the sense in which Assia Djebar, in Le blanc de l'Algérie (1995), writes, addressing Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* of France, again.²² Yes. But now Algerian killing Algerian." Therefore, Spivak says, "Fanon's project is something that we should take forward in newer conjunctures. He already knew that decolonization was not the kind of unquestioned good that a film like Concerning Violence, which I introduced, makes it out to be. Thirdly, we must know, too, that Fanon not only went off from the experience vécu or the real-life experience of blackness into something broader, looking into colonialism rather than just racialism. He also, when Senghor did not respond to his request to go to Senegal, went to Algeria, which is not sub-Saharan Africa. Algerians are in general Mediterranean, Berber, and so on, rather than sub-Saharan, and in that sense the Algerians are not black. When Fanon begins to declare that he is Algerian, people do not understand that he is making a very careful statement the substance of which is to identify with the abstraction of colonialism rather than with the misplaced concreteness of skin color. This is an extremely important thing to remember: Fanon is not a chromatist."

"Let us then speak of such new junctures," I propose to Spivak. "Also, in line with what you describe as a sort of Hegelian progression, from the false concreteness of blackness as skin color to the abstraction of colonialism. What comes to my mind as

part of such an historical-phenomenological narrative is that peculiar sub-section in the chapter 'On Violence,' in The Wretched of the Earth, titled 'Violence at the International Level,' which most readers tend to gloss over. Continuing with your idea of Fanon as affirmative reader of Hegel, one could say that there is this further movement here from the abstract and yet more encompassing materiality of the colonial world to the even more encompassing and some might say more abstract but also speculative world of finance. A world that must have been much more difficult to contemplate in the 1950s or 1960s, but which for us has become quite quotidian and crucial even if we do not understand it, much in the same way medieval Europeans related to religion before the Reformation. Do you think Fanon was considering the process that had begun already in the second half of the twentieth century but would be complete only in our time, that is, the process by means of which the former colonial world would remake itself into a one-world of global finance?" I ask her.

"Yes," Spivak replies. "After all, Fanon lived through a time when the rules of the old colonial world were being re-written. Bretton Woods had already taken place. Therefore, it is not so much that Fanon is prescient. Rather, he knows it is no longer about the mere reality of experience. This is a man who, after all, was finishing a dissertation on psychiatry. This is not a person committed to some linear, narrative view of subjectivity. Therefore, one has to look at Fanon in this way, as someone trying to understand how these big abstract commitments, colonialism, finance and so on—which are not the same everywhere—affect subjects in specific and changing ways. This process of subjective change, which was also his, for whatever reason; this coming clear out of sub-Saharan black Africa and into Mediterranean North Africa, is what he looks into and declares in a language, not Arabic (which by the way he did not know so well). So, when he declares he's Algerian he is saying a very different thing [about the

psychological consequences and implications of colonialism and its avatars] which we do not know how to hear. Then, what you are talking about is the much more leftist idea of the economic implications of the future of colonialism. You can't have a naïve view of decolonization when at least you can think it. You don't know it [what these implications might be] but you can think it."

Listening to Spivak speak of what we do not know how to hear, I wonder whether this is also a case of what we do not want to hear. There is a connection between the two, and it is important. In Aimé Césaire's play about the tragic assassination of the leader of Congolese independence, A Season in the Congo, which Spivak recently translated, the protagonist Patrice Lumumba is the one who pursues the question that no one else wants to hear. The same is the case with Assia Djebar's women, who "are always haunted by desire," as Spivak says. While talking to her, I can't stop thinking about how haunted she herself is. By friends—some alive, most of them dead. But also, and this amounts to the same thing, by desire. Which, in turn, is the same thing as saying that she is haunted by the question no one wants to hear. While discussing Fanon, she produces, out of some testimonial evidence given to her by a ghost-friend, a connection between Frantz Fanon and Patrice Lumumba. When everything seems to be harmonious and under control, in history as in our conversation, the two of them enter the stage in the role of the "discomforter" (as Lumumba refers to himself in Césaire's play); that is, the one who interrupts the straight story. Such is the lesson of tragedy: history does not follow a straight line.

"There is one more thing I'll say here," Spivak observes. "It would be good to look at [the fate of] Pan-Africanism in this context. We hardly talk about these things in the context of Fanon, yet both Fanon and Patrice Lumumba attended the 1958-9 All-African People's Conference in Accra. As I was told by my friend, the Ghanaian poet Kofi

Awoonor who died recently, shot at the Westgate shopping mall in Kenya—he's smiling, we're sitting drinking a fruit juice from his trees at the garden—'well, you know, both the tall one and the short one were at that one.' The tall one is Lumumba, and the short one is of course Fanon. So Fanon had dealings with people like Lumumba. Assia Djébar makes the connection when she writes about the Barbarian who has shown to the Romans that a Berber 'can combine bravery and intelligence with . . . a fierce personal reticence.'²³ Later, the female protagonist of the novel sees him, Jugurtha, that's the Berber's name, dying of hunger in a dungeon in Rome. Djébar says of Jugurtha that he is the first Lumumba."

"There are other connections," Spivak insists. For instance, there is the one that she postulates between Jugurtha, Lumumba, and Fanon, with the help of her ghost friends and theater. There's another, if one brings into the conversation Souleymane Bachir Diagne's introduction to Spivak's version of A Season: "Everything is under control and then comes a 'discomforter,'" he observes.²⁴

Enter Orestes/Jugurtha

So, here it is, another point of entry into history, through philosophy and theater, violence, and the decolonial: Enter Orestes/Oedipus/Socrates/Diotima/Jugurtha/the Rebel/Caliban/Cugoano/Christophe/Du Bois/Lumumba/Fanon/Djébar/Césaire/Spivak. Enter the one ("the tall one and the short one") who pursues the question no one wants to hear. Let us call this "An Adjusted Theatrical Account of World History and Philosophy," with a nod to Paget Henry.²⁵ In the novel cited by Spivak, Djébar writes: "I see him [Jugurtha] again, this time 'on the

road to Rome,' handed over in chains. 'Rome, a city for sale!' he used to proclaim. He is conquered and taught a lesson. He is Africa's first Lumumba."²⁶

"There are two theories of translation," Spivak notes in her translator's foreword to A Season in the Congo; "you add yourself to the original, or you efface yourself and let the text shine. I subscribe to the second."²⁷ Maybe we can extrapolate here. Let us speculate that there are equally two theories and practices of history: in the first one, you add yourself to the tradition, imitating its canonical figures, whom you follow. In the second one, you let the text shine, as it is the product of an exemplary author that serves as a model, not for imitation, not as a clay figure, but for influence in the condition of freedom. I subscribe to the second.

This is creative freedom, the kind that befits the man or woman "who asks for the impossible," as Bachir Diagne says. He also refers to the exemplary character in history as one "who declares stubbornly that what everybody . . . is satisfied with will not do for him". "Thus Lumumba is convinced that Africa needs his intransigence," and he sets another path in motion, one that in his case would end in death, like Salvador Allende, when they ruin the prevailing consensus around compromise "by proclaiming as the true goal for the people . . . the same concept of freedom but in his own tongue."²⁸

German philosopher Immanuel Kant had a name for this procedure. He called it succession, the subjective rediscovery of the maxims of the categorical imperative. For Kant, here following the poet John Milton, achieving a moment of rational "conversion," "rebirth," or "revolution" is demonstrably earned "by a formalism of the mind that the formalism of poetry discloses," as Sanford Budick puts it.²⁹

Perhaps Spivak's seemingly innocuous comment during our conversation—"Fanon had dealings with people like Lumumba"—can be understood in a similar vein, for she engages the ethically productive power of the sublime poetry and tragedy of

Fanon's text, and of Djébar's and Césaire's, affirmatively. Is this the point of her "sabotage" strategy of critical reading? If so, then let us postulate that this is the affirmative mode of writing and philosophy, and of truthful (as opposed to purely eliminative) philosophers. And let us include Malcolm X and the Panthers in the context of Pan-Africanism, as well as Guevara, Salvador and Beatriz Allende, and Neruda's poetry. But also Spivak herself. Crucially, this is not at all different from what Kant found in Milton's poetry. We may ask henceforth, what are the implications of the affirmative mode of writing philosophy in history?

"This is a very different kind of connection," Spivak says. "Lumumba came from Belgian Congo, which is very different from French North Africa, where Fanon ended up. This is why Sartre couldn't understand him. He was disgusted with Lumumba, dismissed him with one word. So we have to remember those connections as well, not just the story of being black, being an African revolutionary, and condoning violence."

Listening to Spivak in conversation, there emerges an affirmative Fanon, the healer, in opposition to the purely eliminative Fanon and Lumumba—and Allende—that we get from Arendt and Sartre and from the neoliberals and the(ir) official story that represents the former solely as purveyors of destructive violence. "If you look at the issue of Présence Africaine published in 1962 after Fanon's death," Spivak says, almost whispering in my ear, "the one in which Aimé Césaire wrote Fanon's obituary—Máspéro writes one also, it is a pretty sublime issue—you get a sense of how Fanon is absolutely not a clay figure of the African revolutionary condoning violence, etcetera. It's just not on. I just want to say that to get a sense of the—excuse the word—reality of Fanon, it is worth reading what those close friends had to say about him. Before he was made into just such a clay figure."

I listen carefully. Let us use another word. The one Kant used. Let us say that Fanon is image, the intelligence of a machine and *exemplarity* as such.

Notes

¹ Concerning Violence: Nine Scenes from the Anti-Imperialistic Self-Defense.

directed by Göran Hugo Olson (distributed by Alive Mind, 2014).

² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Aimé Césaire, A Season in the Congo, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: Seagull, 2010).

³ Jean Epstein, The Intelligence of a Machine (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2014). For Epstein the cinematographic robot-philosopher, more than the human philosopher, presents through images “such an inconstancy of categories flowing one into the other ... an absolutely general law of correlation with the values that the time variable can adopt ... it also authorizes or prohibits the very conception of a causal or statistical law, and even more generally, the idea of any relation of succession”, 88-89.

⁴ Epstein, 56.

⁵ Stefan Bird-Pollan, Hegel, Freud and Fanon: The Dialectics of Emancipation (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 7.

⁶ Étienne Balibar, Citizen Subject. Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017) 281-284.

⁷ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “The Untimely, Again,” in Pierre Clastres, Archeology of Violence, 9-51 (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 23-24.

⁸ Viveiros de Castro, 25-26.

⁹ Viveiros de Castro, 27. See also Shumon Basar, Douglas Coupland, and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, The Age of Earthquakes: A Guide to the Extreme Present (London: Penguin, 2015).

¹¹ Bird-Pollan, 7-8.

¹² Lewis R. Gordon, What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 40-41.

¹³ Linda Martín-Alcoff wrote: “Trump and the far right are worried about the 'Latin americanization' of the US. But they are doing a Latin Americanization of US politics! He is having rallies now to whip up his supporters, he's got the far right mobilized. We are going to be facing paramilitaries, non-state actors that the government can hide behind. Trump=Uribe”. **Posted on Facebook, 2 December, 2016.**

¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, A Dying Colonialism, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1994). Original French edition published in 1959.

¹⁵ Jean Franco, Cruel Modernity (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ Winifred Woodhull, Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Theresa May, speech to the Conservative Party Conference, Manchester, UK, October 6, 2015, cited from full text available from The Independent, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-s-speech-to-the-conservative-party-conference-in-full-a6681901.html>

¹⁸ David Cameron, speech to the Conservative Party Conference, Manchester, UK, October 7, 2015. Full text of speech available from The Mirror, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/david-camerons-full-speech-conservative-6589711>

¹⁹ Gordon, 32.

²⁰ Published in English as Assia Djebar, Women of Algiers in Their Apartment, trans. Marjolijn de Jager and Clarisse Zimra (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992).

²¹ See Ernesto Laclau, "Ethics, Normativity and the Heteronomy of the Law," The Rhetorical Foundations of Society 126-137 (London: Verso, 2014), 133.

²² Published in English as Algerian White, trans. David Kelley and Marjolijn de Jager (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000).

²³ Assia Djébar, So Vast the Prison, trans. Betsy Wing (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999), 344.

²⁴ Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "Introduction," ix-xv Césaire, A Season in the Congo, xiii-xiv.

²⁵ Henry, Paget, "An Adjusted Account of American Philosophy," Masterclass, Caribbean Philosophical Association Summer Course, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, June 1, 2015.

²⁶ Djébar, So Vast the Prison, 344.

²⁷ Spivak, "Translator's Forward," Assia Djébar, A Season in the Congo, vii.

²⁸ Diagne, "Introduction," xii-xiv.

²⁹ Sanford Budick, Kant and Milton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 4-5.